Introduction

I wrote the last pages of *The Thirties* in December 1939, in a barrack hut at Ash Vale, near Aldershot, It was the dep6t of the Military Police, to whom at that time we, the embryonic Intelligence Corps, known then as Field Security, were attached- The surrounding scrubland country remains fixed in, my mind as particularly desolate and stale, as though troops had been tramping over it for centuries past, stunting its growth and drying up its fertility. Aldershot, likewise, I recall as a place of dull streets echoing with heavy footsteps from whose sombre gloom one turned with relief into the lights and sounds and human throng of public bars.

The Military Police, especially their warrant officers, had the greatest contempt for us Held Security men. From their point of view, we were a scruffy, miscellaneous lot, who wore our uniforms awry, made a pitiful showing on the barrack square, and nonetheless gained promotion all too quickly, sprouting overnight with stripes and other insignia of rank. We had been recruited as a result of a newspaper advertisement for linguists; in England the surest way of assembling oddities and delinquents, ranging between carpet-sellers from Smyrna, travel agency

couriers, unfrocked clergymen, language teachers and free4ance journalists.

Seated on my barrack-hut bed, one of fourteen, I scribbled out the last pages of *The Thirties;* an ageing private, clad in breeches, puttees, heavy boots and a high-necked tunic (battb-dress was not yet on issue), with thick combinations